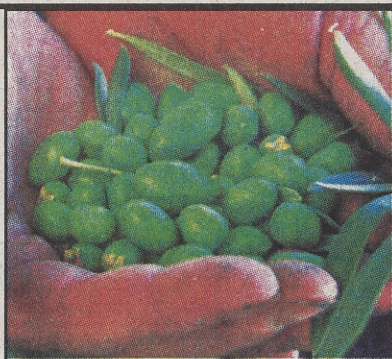


AGRICULTURE

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GISTER-PAJARONIAN

Watsonville, Calif.

Monday, August 31, 1998

131st Year — No. 153

'All our young people must work together'

Father of slain teen speaks out at mural dedication

By TARMO HANNULA
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Festive celebration blended with somber reflection in Watsonville Sunday at the dedication ceremony of the newly restored Mona Lisa Cafe mural at Front and Rodriguez streets.

About 300 people gathered for the event which featured numerous musical groups, dancers, speakers, food and fun between noon and 5 p.m.

Alejandro Lopez, the father of Alex Lopez, who was killed a week ago by gunfire near the Kennedy Youth Center, addressed the crowd as he choked back tears. "All our young people must work together," Lopez said.

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Eduardo Peña (from left), Alejandro Lopez and Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina share a few words after Lopez addressed the crowd about his son's death.



Photos by Tarmo Hannula

A dancer of the Folklorico group Esperanza del Valle of Watsonville dazzles the crowd at the mural dedication Sunday.

MURAL 1998

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"We must help one another stay away from this gang violence and gang involvement." Lopez was comforted by several family members and friends as he dabbed his eyes with a handkerchief. Lopez thanked the attendees at the mural dedication for their support.

The 51-foot-long mural, which depicts scenes of Aztec and Mayan history, and peace and unity in current Chicano culture, was recently fully restored by a joint community effort directed by Watsonville mural artist Yermo Aranda. Dozens of community youth were joined by the Watsonville Brown Berets, the White Hawk Aztec Dancers, Hope Ministries, and eight youths from the Hire a Youth/Career Works to help save the mural. Final touches, including the names of the people that helped with the restoration, were still being painted Sunday at the dedication ceremony. The mural was designed by Alex Louis Espinoza in 1974.

Yermo Aranda addressed the crowd and also thanked the Watsonville community. "Thanks to so many people in this community, this

wonderful mural has now been restored," Aranda said. Aranda introduced Carmen Leon, one of the artists who worked on the original mural in 1976.

"For me, this is a great honor to witness the renewal of this mural and to get the sense of revival we have in our youth," Leon said. Leon, Espinoza and Vicki Petrovich were three of the key artists who originally painted the mural. Espinoza died a week after its completion.

Front and Rodriguez streets — blocked to traffic for the event — was the site for a colorful festival of events, including the Watsonville Folklorico group, Esperanza del Valle, Los Culpables mariachi band, The White Hawk Aztec dancers, a musical group from Mexico City, Criminales, and several other performers that treated the audience to spirited tunes, Mexican folk dance and more.

Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina spoke briefly of the importance of such gatherings and he told the crowd that 110 percent of police efforts are dedicated to tracking down those responsible for the death of Alex Lopez. "God does not recognize red or blue," an emotional Medina said. "This is a time to say 'No more violence.'"

Medina pleaded with the community to help with any information leading to the arrest of the Lopez killers. "We cannot do this alone," Medina said. "We need someone to come forward to help apprehend the person responsible for this killing." Holding his straw sun hat over his heart, visibly shaken, Medina turned and comforted Mr. Lopez.

Restoration of the mural was made possible by a variety of sponsors including Watsonville Parks

and Recreation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the California Arts Council, the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, the Committee for Violence Reduction, and Fenix Services.

"I think today turned out to be a great success," said Luis Alejo, project coordinator for the mural restoration. "This alcohol-free event should leave a lasting impression to help end violence in our community."

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